The Last Tree Burning
and
Other Poems

Spiro Markou

The Last Tree Burning and Other Poems
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Contents

A Bouquet of Roses.....5
The Woman with the Voice of the Crystal Bell.....9
The Man on the Rock.....15
Caught at the Blast of the Trumpet.....16
Land, Sea, Sky and I.....18
The Girl at the Well.....21
The Yellow House.....22
The Last Tree Burning.....31

A Bouquet of Roses

The room empty of her,
A bouquet of roses...
A man puts a gun
To a temple of his head–
My husband;
A man puts a gun
To a temple of his head–
Always remember;
A man puts a gun
To a temple of his head–
Our love.

My husband, always remember our love.
Flirting walking through the park in the sun;
Nestling running up the drive in the rain;
Laughing tumbling on the field in the snow.

My husband, always remember our love.
A weekend staying out in the country;
A morning taking in the museum;
A holiday lazing around the house.

My husband, always remember our love.
Meeting our kisses and kisses hello,
Parting our kisses and kisses good-bye–
Forever:
The room empty of her,
A bouquet of roses...

A bouquet of roses...
A gun to a temple of a man's head–
My husband;
A gun to a temple of a man's head–

Always remember;
A gun to a temple of a man's head–
Our love.

My husband, always remember our love.
Promise me you will never forget our love.
Waking up before dawn
Whispering our sweet-nothings
And making love, making love–
Never again:
The room empty of her,
A bouquet of roses...
A sweetheart of a girl...
A gun, a gun, a gun
To a temple of a man's head.

A gun to a temple of a man's head–
Promise me you will never forget our love.
Our first date and the moment of our first kiss;
Our engagement and the exchange of our rings;
Our wedding and everybody's best wishes
And our wedding-night with all the hope of love–
Gone, all gone forever:
The room empty of her,
A bouquet of roses...

A bouquet of roses...
A sweetheart of a girl...–
The world's mountains crumbled
The world's forests decayed
The world's oceans dried up
The world's lands frozen
The world's skies blotted out
The world's days blotted out
The world's nights blotted out
The world blotted out:

The chair empty of her,
The mirror empty of her,
The bed empty of her:
The room empty of her,
A bouquet of roses...
A sweetheart of a girl...
A gun, a gun, a gun
To a temple of my head.

A gun to a temple of my head:
A bouquet of roses
Lying on her, her, her...
My finger on the trigger–
My husband–
My finger on the trigger–
My husband–
My finger on the trigger:
Her grave: her grave: her grave:
A bouquet of roses
Lying on her grave:
A bouquet of roses lying on her grave.

A bouquet of roses lying on her grave.
A gun to a temple of my head.
My finger on the trigger.

My finger on the trigger–
My husband, always remember our love.
Promise me you will never forget our love.
You do promise?

You do promise?

You do promise?
My husband, I thank you.
Now my heart is at rest

I can leave you.

Now my heart is at rest I can leave you.
A bouquet of roses lying on her grave.

The Woman with the Voice of the Crystal Bell

Heart
Did you hear?

Mind
Did I hear?

Heart
Was it her?

Mind
Was it her?
I do not know whom you mean.

Heart
You do know whom I mean.

Mind
If you insist, perhaps I do know;
But why do you not name her?

Heart
You should know why I do not name her.

Mind
I do know why you do not dare.–

Heart
Despite what you say, I do dare
Confess she...

Mind
She?

Heart
She, she...

Mind
No, you do not dare confess.–

Heart
Yes, yes, I do dare confess:
The woman with the voice of the crystal bell.

Mind
You confess you do remember
The woman with the voice of the crystal bell?

Heart
I confess I do remember
The woman with the voice of the crystal bell.
And I further confess I shall always remember her,
And how she used to sit in the little open chapel
Surrounded by we the children who played on the green grass.

Mind
We the children who played on the green grass?

Heart
We the children who played on the green grass
Once upon a time,
Before the great strife erupted
And the little open chapel was destroyed,
The green grass was burned,
We the children were defiled
And became you and I and they
And much, much worse,
Became, became–
There she is again;
You must have heard her.

Mind
I must have heard her?
But how can you have heard her?
It is incredibly absurd
You can even remember her, much less hear her;
Because it would presuppose a time before the great strife:
A time of once upon a time.–
Yes, incredibly absurd.

Heart
No, no, you...–

Mind
A time of once upon a time?
There was never such a time.
You can remember her and hear her?
But remember her and hear her of a time which never was?
Utterly impossible beyond all question;
Therefore the existence of her of a time which never was?
Utterly impossible beyond all question.

Heart
No, no, you speak craven lies and nothing but craven lies
In your fear to confess the time of once upon a time
And the truth of the little open chapel,
The truth of the green grass,
The truth of we the children,
Yes, the truth of her, her the woman with the voice of the crystal bell;
For if you were to confess, you would fully expose the present time:
The horrendous abomination of the flat blank world:
The horrendous negation of once upon a time.

Mind
Do you therefore understand why I speak as I speak?
Do you therefore understand why I am as I am?
For you, your own welfare

And, yes, for me, my own welfare
And for them, their own welfare,
The welfare of all you and I and they
Once upon a time we the children who played on the green grass.

Heart
What, am I mistaken you remember?

Mind
No, you are not mistaken I remember;
But I beg of you, please, do not persist
In assailing the imperative lie.

Heart
Do you the wary one, in the flat blank world long after the great strife, confess
The imperative lie is an utter lie and nothing but an utter lie?

Mind
I beg of you, please, do not persist in assailing the imperative lie.

Heart
Do you confess the imperative lie is an utter lie and nothing but an utter lie?

Mind
Enough, enough, I confess, confess...
No, do not force me to be explicit.–
Please, please, I can barely endure it as it is.

Heart
Forgive me, please, forgive me everything;
I am, to my shame, simply a coward
Possessed by the need to be reassured.–

Mind
I shall never, never forget once upon a time
And the woman with the voice of the crystal bell.

How could I ever, ever forget?
No, I shall never, never forget
She, she used to talk to we the children who played on the green grass
Of marvellous things beyond our ken and, yet, closely familiar
With that voice of hers, ah, that so magical voice of hers
So like the crystal bell of the little open chapel.
Remember, do you remember?

Heart
Remember, I do remember.–

Mind
She used to teach we the children who played on the green grass
So good and beautiful things, yes, so good and beautiful
The songs of the birds,
The gospels of the trees,
The secrets of the stones,
So good and beautiful things, yes, so good and beautiful
The dreams of the clouds,
The canons of the winds,
The dances of the flowers,
Ah, yes, so good and beautiful the life of the green grass.

Heart
Ah, yes, so good and beautiful the life of the green grass.–
Hear, do you hear?

Mind
Hear, I do hear.

Heart
Is it the woman with the voice of the crystal bell?

Mind
It is the woman with the voice of the crystal bell.

Heart and Mind
The woman with the voice of the crystal bell.

The Man on the Rock

1

The man on the rock before the ocean
And the salt and tempest of the ocean.
The stranger ship shall be sighted
With unfathomed treasures freighted;
The lands shall be made prosperous,
The peoples shall be made joyous
From the salt and tempest of the ocean.

2

The stranger ship not yet sighted.
The rock hoary, battered
By ages upon ages
Of the salt and tempest of the ocean
Totters–
The man ageless, untouched
Clear-eyed, clean-limbed, calm-hearted,
Erect on the rock before the ocean
And ages upon ages
Of the salt and tempest of the ocean:
The stranger ship shall be sighted
With unfathomed treasures freighted;
The lands shall be made prosperous,
The peoples shall be made joyous
From the salt and tempest of the ocean.

Caught at the Blast of the Trumpet

The blast of the trumpet and caught
Dozing senselessly on the bed;
Drooping listlessly in the chair;
Drifting aimlessly through the streets.

The blast of the trumpet and caught
Standing, undecided, before the stair;
Standing, undecided, before the phone;
Standing, undecided, before the door.

The blast of the trumpet and caught
Planning, soon, to take a trip to the country;
Planning, soon, to go swimming at the lake;
Planning, soon, to spend the day at the house.

The blast of the trumpet and caught
Disdaining, as when young, to gaze at the moon;
Disdaining, as when young, to gaze at the clouds;
Disdaining, as when young, to gaze at the stars.

The blast of the trumpet and caught
Fearing to go out into the snow and the cold;
Fearing to go out into the sun and the heat;
Fearing to go out into the rain and the wind.

The blast of the trumpet and caught
Despairing in the thought of the past;
Despairing in the thought of the present;
Despairing in the thought of the future.

The blast of the trumpet and caught
Hiding greedily in the desk the extra bill;
Keeping greedily in the closet the extra shirt;

Hoarding greedily in the bin the extra bread.

The blast of the trumpet and caught
Refusing, in your ingratitude, to give thanks;
Refusing, in your arrogance, to beg pardon;
Refusing, in your selfishness, to wish good luck.

The blast of the trumpet and caught
Forgetting, in your trivial cares, to hear her, to hear him;
Forgetting, in your trivial cares, to kiss her, to kiss him;
Forgetting, in your trivial cares, to hug her, to hug him.

The blast of the trumpet–
Verily, the blast of the trumpet and caught
Failing, in your stupidity, to say to her, to him, for the first time, “I love you”.–

Verily, verily, the blast of the trumpet and caught
Neglecting, in your complacency, to say to her, to him, for the last time, “I love you”.

Land, Sea, Sky and I

Land and I

Land my day and land my night,
Land my hour and land my moment.

I pet the kind flower,
And nuzzle the kind flower;
Handshake the faithful tree,
And hug the faithful tree;
Smile at the bashful plant,
And cuddle the bashful plant.

I chirp with the cheery bird;
Skit with the silly butterfly;
Buzz with the busy bee.

I romp and prattle in the carefree rain;
Somersault and laugh in the funny snow;
Stroll and yawn in the lazy weather.

I dream on the fanciful hill;
Wander in the allusive wood;
Remember in the nostalgic field.–

Land my land!

I bloom and whistle in the infant spring;
Burn and dance in the young summer;
Sober and harvest in the mature fall;
Repose and reflect in the old winter.–

Land my flesh!

Sea and I

Sea my day and sea my night,
Sea my hour and sea my moment.

I flirt with the shameless fish,
And kiss the shameless fish;
Converse with the smart dolphin,
And race with the smart dolphin;
Listen to the musical shell,
And play the musical shell.

I whirl in the mad maelstrom;
Sail on the bold billow;
Relax in the lucid shallow.

I explore the primeval mountain of the deepest depth,
And explore the primeval valley of the deepest depth.–

Sea my sea!

I ebb with the great modesty of the humble tide,
And flow with the great grandeur of the majestic tide.–

Sea my blood!

Sky and I

Sky my day and sky my night,
Sky my hour and sky my moment.

I rise new with the manly sun,
And set surfeited with the manly sun;
Wax whole with the womanly moon,
And wane dormant with the womanly moon.

I soar in the exultant space;
Drift in the casual air;
Doze in the pacific cloud.

I flash with the fleet lightning of the cosmic storm,
And blast with the savage wind of the cosmic storm,
And roar with the mighty thunder of the cosmic storm.

I chant the supreme litany with the devout planet,
And perform the supreme sacrament with the devout planet,
And contemplate the supreme mystery with the devout planet.–

Sky my sky!

I chime and shine with the eternal light of the divine star.–

Sky my soul!

The Girl at the Well

White hands of her, solemn white hands of her thrust down
Into the waters of the well
The rare waters of the well, the dear waters of the well
Of wishes: the wishing-well;
White hands of her, certain white hands of her cast up
A mystic spell of wishes, and wishes and wishes
Splash in fair hair of her
Sweeping fair hair of her
Devoutly wet, doubly blessed
Swinging fair hair of her
Trustfully wet, triply blessed
With wishes for present, wishes for yet, alas, wishes for nevermore
Of waters rarest, waters dearest, yes, waters blessedest for evermore
Of the wishing-well in the garden
Of youth in the sunshine
Of faith, simple faith in wishes coming true.

The Yellow House

Husband
We have reached, finally, the yellow house.

Wife
We always believed
We would reach, eventually, the yellow house
If we just kept together,
Regardless of the obstacles.

Husband
And there were a lot of obstacles.

Wife
But we barely even noticed them,
Being together as we were.

Husband
Luckily, I had you.

Wife
And, luckily, I had you.

Husband
Luckily, you and I were together.

Wife
And, at the moment, we are together
In the street in front of the yellow house
After all the many, many years.

Husband
It has been so many years
Since we left the yellow house

I cannot even count them.

Wife
The many years have been hard
On the yellow house, I notice.

Husband
I hoped you would not notice.

Wife
The paint on the yellow house is no longer fresh and bright,
As we kept it those wonderful years we lived in it,
But old and faded and, worse yet, cracked and peeling.

Husband
Nobody must be living in the yellow house now
And nobody must have lived in it for many years.
No, the years did not, by themselves, wreak such havoc.

Wife
So inside the yellow house?

Husband
The clock on the mantel?

Wife
The lamp in the hall?

Husband
The bed in the room?

Wife
Yes, the bed in the room?

Husband
What have the many years themselves and the many years of neglect done to...?–

Wife
The bed in the room?
The lamp in the hall?
The clock on the mantel?

Husband
With nobody living in the yellow house now
And nobody having lived in it for many years,
The clock on the mantel is it ticking?
The lamp in the hall is it lit?
The bed in the room is it made?

Wife
I am afraid if we enter the yellow house,
Together as we usually did those wonderful years,
We will not find things as they used to be, no,
Not find the clock ticking and telling the time,
Not find the lamp lit and showing the way,
Not find the bed made and waiting for us.

Husband
Yes, we must simply accept the horrible truth.
But it is, to say the least, unfortunate
Nobody lives in the yellow house anymore
And has not, apparently, for many years.
The yellow house will, one day, fall
Into complete ruins.

Wife
Yes, the yellow house will be, one day, in complete ruins.
We were, probably, the last to live in it–
We should have never left the yellow house.
No, it would have never been in the poor shape it is now.

Husband
But we did not want to leave the yellow house.

We were, remember, forced to leave it.

Wife
Instead of remaining here in the street in front of the yellow house,
Why do we not simply enter it
And again take possession of it?

Husband
Again take possession of the yellow house?
But our lease, I seem to remember, expired
And could never be renewed, no,
Never at any time whatever.

Wife
Those were frightful terms.
Who ever wrote such terms?
And why did we ever agree to them?
Or did we, in fact, ever agree to them?

Husband
I only know I was very lucky
You were with me, by my side then.

Wife
I, too, was very lucky you were by my side then
And am very lucky you are by my side now.

Husband
I bless the moment we found one another again
After those years, those terrible, terrible years
Of forced separation from one another.

Wife
And I, as you, bless the moment
With all my heart and soul.

Husband
I, too, with all my heart and soul.
Now if only...–

Wife
Now if only...–

Husband
We could again enter the yellow house.

Wife
But we are never again to enter the yellow house.

Husband
And never again to love one another in the yellow house.

Wife
No, never again to love one another in the yellow house.

Husband
But, maybe, it is better we will never again enter the yellow house.
Notwithstanding, outside, the paint is faded, cracked and peeling,
We can try to pretend to ourselves, inside, all is well, yes,
The clock is there on the mantel ticking and telling the time,
The lamp is there in the hall lit and showing the way,
The bed is there in the room made and waiting for us.

Wife
And we can try to pretend to ourselves–
But there is something which worries me even more.
Though together in the street in front of the yellow house
Worn by the many years themselves and the many years of neglect...–

Husband
You, as I, feel...–

Wife
We are not, somehow, really here.

Husband
If not really in the street in front of the yellow house,
With the paint faded, cracked and peeling,
Where, where ever can we possibly be?
I find it impossible to understand.

Wife
I, too–
Am frightened.

Husband
I, too, am frightened
If we leave the yellow house
For good this time, I feel,
The yellow house will disappear
For good this time, I feel.

Wife
Are there, nowadays, no others like ourselves
To live in the yellow house and care for it?

Husband
No others like ourselves in the yellow house
To love one another with endless devotion?

Wife
So it is best...–

Husband
If we simply leave the yellow house
And try to forget it and all it meant to us.

Wife
Simply turn our back on the yellow house and walk away from it
And all it meant to us in the past, all those many, many years ago.

Husband
But after we do, let us be extremely careful
Not to turn round and look at the yellow house.
I am frightened...–

Wife
We cannot know what might happen, no,
Not before it is too late.
So maybe we should remain in the street in front of the yellow house.
That way, regardless of anything else, of whatever might happen,
We will be together, side by side.

Husband
Together, side by side
For as long as the yellow house remains standing,
Be it, outside, faded, cracked and peeling
And, inside, if not empty of everything,
The clock on the mantel ruined,
The lamp in the hall ruined,
The bed in the room ruined:
Everything inside the yellow house ruined.

Wife
Yes, it is, probably, best to remain in the street in front of the yellow house.
Otherwise, we might be, somehow, separated,
Each alone to somewhere we cannot know
There down the street, somewhere there in the distance we cannot know.
So because, all those many, many years ago, we vowed to one another...–

Husband
A sacred vow.

Wife
Yes, a sacred vow.
But I do not want to force you.

Husband
I desire nothing more, you know very well, than for us to be together.
So I am absolutely willing to remain here in front of the yellow house.

Wife
But should we not, first, carefully consider everything?
How long the yellow house will remain standing?
And once in complete ruins, what will happen?
Will we be able to go away together?
Or will we be, automatically, separated,
You torn from my side and I torn from your side
And each alone, without the other disappear
To somewhere we cannot know
Forever?–
No, we cannot risk it.
Yes, you take my hand.

Husband
And you take my hand.

Wife
And we will simply turn our back on the yellow house
And all it meant to us those wonderful years we lived in it
Before we were forced, utterly against our will, to leave it.

Husband
Together, your hand in mine and my hand in yours, turn our back on the yellow house.

Wife
Yes, together, your hand in mine and my hand in yours, leave the yellow house.

Husband
We are never again to look behind us,
But are always to follow the street
To wherever it might lead us,
Simply refusing to be separated from one another
And tightly holding on to one another
Against anything ill which might happen.
I am ready.
Are you ready?

Wife
Yes, I am ready.

Husband
So let us now together, together leave the yellow house.

Wife
Yes, let us now together, together leave the yellow house
Forever.

The Last Tree Burning

The last tree burning
In nothingness;
A mother weeping
In nothingness.

Hosts on hosts of distorted human shapes
Of trespass and infidelity, remorse and agony
Strive to circle
Against the last turn of time,
Around the last tree burning
In nothingness.

Irreparable grief of betrayal
Of the souls of suicides
Of children,
Around the last tree burning
To ashes in nothingness.

Dilatory little swirl of dust
Of the deletion
Of the whole universe,
Above the last tree burning
To ashes in nothingness.

A single immeasurable amorphous mass
Of trespass and infidelity, remorse and agony
Wiped away in nothingness
By the last turn of time...ended–
The ashes of the last tree
Drift away in nothingness;
Distant cry of a mother
Fades away in nothingness.